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NATIONAL AID TO COMMON SCHOOLS.

MONEY derived by taxation from the people, in a representative popular government, should be expended only for those objects which are of supreme necessity, and which can be secured by the State alone, or to an extent so far beyond the possible results of individual action as to justify governmental interference upon considerations of the general welfare: the greatest good of the greatest number. This principle undoubtedly authorizes the several States in the Union to appropriate from their revenues for a system of free public schools, and, under certain conditions, might warrant an expenditure from the national treasury for the education of school populations in such States as, from any cause, are unable or unwilling to provide for general instruction. The definition of this power is necessarily vague and uncertain. It must be left to the final judgment of those who are intrusted with its exercise. Legislation is the science of compromise and adjustment. It has no syllogisms and no mathematical demonstrations. If practical advantages result, either from observance or from violation of established maxims, it is enough.

The proposition to tax the people of the United States seventy-nine million dollars, in addition to the amounts they now pay for education, to support common schools in the several States and Territories of the Union, is therefore a complex problem, and its just solution must depend upon many conditions not yet clearly ascertained.

The necessity for education as a permanent element of our national life is admitted. The public school system is everywhere ineradicably established. It is inseparable from our civilization, and is imbedded in the purposes and convictions of the people. It is recognized in the organic law of every State. It has grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, without any intervention on the part of the General Government, or any attempt at national control or supervision. Its beneficent functions, not only

in morals and manners but in politics, are fully recognized ; and those who demand a change in the agencies by which those results have been attained should show cause, affirmatively, for the modifications which they propose. This the advocates of the measure that recently passed the Senate attempt to do, by the averment that, in certain States of the Union, there is a menacing mass of infant and adult illiteracy, with which those communities are unable to cope. No indisposition or disinclination is alleged in any quarter ; the question is one of ability and capacity. Neither has it been denied that these illiterates belong almost exclusively to the colored race. No mendicant was so shameless as to claim that assistance was required for the education of the Caucasians. Divested of its drapery, therefore, the plain question is, whether the nation should contribute to the support and maintenance of common schools for colored children, the descendants of the slaves who were liberated and enfranchised in the Southern States by the operations of the Civil War. It does not concern the manumitted slaves, for there is no person of school age now in the United States, black or white, who was not born free.

The answer to this assumed necessity for contributions toward the education of colored children in the late slave States is a bill to distribute seventy-nine million dollars from the treasury among all the States and Territories of the Union, in proportion to the illiteracy of their entire population, and not upon the basis of the illiteracy of those of school age, which could alone be remedied, nor of the colored illiterates, for whose instruction it is actually intended.

In three fundamental particulars, therefore, the pending measure is radically and essentially dishonest. The degrading implication that any State or Territory, north of the Potomac and the Ohio Rivers or on the Pacific slope, is unable or indisposed to maintain the free common school system without national aid, is as false as it is impudent, and yet they are all included in the bill. As an independent proposition, the assumption that Massachusetts, New York or Kansas required pecuniary assistance for the next ten years to support their public schools would be regarded with derision, and the offer of such aid would be rejected with contempt.

The inclusion of those illiterates above the school age as a basis for the acquisition of the money by the Southern States, approaches the frontier of grand larceny. It is without justification either in morals or reason.

The exclusion of the same class in the distribution of the money in those States, completes this exhibition of legislative jugglery, under which twenty million dollars are to be given to States and Territories that do not ask it, and nearly sixty million dollars to the States lately in rebellion, ostensibly for the education of the colored children therein. But the practical result of the scheme will be, that, out of the sixty million dollars distributed in the South, nearly forty millions will be devoted to the education of white children, and less than twenty millions to the colored children, for whom it is all nominally appropriated ! How much of this fragment of twenty millions the colored race would ultimately receive at the hands of those who have shown such devotion to their welfare hitherto, is left to conjecture. It is perhaps not unjust to suspect that the white leaders in South Carolina and Mississippi will not exert themselves inordinately to elevate the blacks to such a condition of intelligence and independence that the suppression of acknowledged majorities by violence and fraud will at last become impossible.

Assuming for the moment that the seventy-nine million dollars would be impartially distributed and honestly applied to the objects for which it is designed, statistics do not disclose the existence of any conditions in the Southern States that call for national interference. The total school population in 1884 in those States was 6,249,902 ; an increase from 1882 of 375,539. The entire expenditure for school purposes for 1884 was \$17,053,-467 ; an increase from 1882 of \$2,232,495. But it is a very significant incident of this computation, that, while the colored school population is about one-half of the whole number, the white children receive more than two-thirds the aggregate amount that is alleged to be devoted to the equal education of both. The expenditure, *per capita*, for the enrolled school population of both races is about five dollars ; and, while this is inadequate, it is steadily increasing from year to year with the growth of the tax-paying capacity of the people. There is a subtle and contagious energy in the idea of universal education, which is being slowly communicated through the South, rousing its apathetic lethargy to new life. If left to the operation of those forces which have been so potential elsewhere, the whole lump will soon be leavened ; the fatal virus left by the inoculation of slavery will be eliminated, and a more powerful and enduring civilization will be builded upon

the ruins of the old. It should not be forgotten that the former social fabric was erected upon compulsory ignorance. A few educated leaders did the thinking for each community. A slave who learns to think learns not to be a slave. When the soul is emancipated the body cannot be enchained. The war was the least part of the revolution that has occurred in the South. The liberation of the slaves emancipated their masters from a servitude more dangerous and more degrading than slavery; and the subsequent agitations have resulted from the gradual readjustment of the dislocated social and political forces to their new environment. Had the Republican party been courageous or intelligent enough to have attempted the reconstruction of the South through its brains, rather than through its numbers, the most lamentable chapter in our history might have been unwritten. The true regeneration of the South dates from the final withdrawal of national intervention in 1877, and the disastrous failure of the experiment should be an instructive lesson to those sciolists who again invoke governmental control and supervision of local affairs in the States, upon any pretext whatever, unless the wrongs to be redressed, or the dangers to be averted, are so immediate and so formidable as to admit of no other remedy.

The perpetual lamentation about the impoverishment of the South has no just basis, and appeals for charity on this account are either cowardly or insincere. There is no part of the country that has made more substantial progress since the war ended; none that is richer in every element of an enduring and opulent prosperity. Soil, climate, timber, metals, coal, harbors, navigable streams, combine to afford every essential requisite of a wealthy, strong and tranquil civilization. Perhaps the most absurd fallacy is the reiterated declaration that, by the act of emancipation, four billion dollars of property was destroyed; as if the transfer of the ownership of four million human beings from their masters to themselves annihilated their value to the State! Slavery was the most extravagant industrial system that was ever devised, and statistics abundantly show that free labor in the South, even under the most unfavorable circumstances, has already become more economical and profitable. Financially, the Southern States are just as competent to educate their infant illiterates without national aid as any other of the States and Territories of the Union. What they require is vigorous preaching of the gospel of work.

Reared in the idea that labor is degrading, in every emergency they prefer to beg rather than to dig. If there is a flood, a cyclone, an exposition, a tax due on whisky or a race to educate, they cry out lustily that they are poor and appeal to Congress for relief. Professional pauperism offers an easy method of subsistence, but it is not consistent with an elevated manhood. Mendicancy is a recognized calling, but it is not a hopeful characteristic for an entire community. Its occasional success, however, received a brilliant illustration in the "loan" of seventeen hundred thousand dollars to the New Orleans Exposition—the most stupendous case of bunco-steering in the annals of recorded time.

Another favorite argument in support of the educational gift enterprise is founded on the assertion that the Southern States did not share in the donations from the public domain for school, college and university purposes. Speaking literally, in the case of two or three of the original thirteen this may be true, but as a general statement it is wholly incorrect. The State of Mississippi received nearly one-sixth of its entire area for various public uses; a gift that, properly husbanded, would have produced a fund whose income would have defrayed the entire expenses of the State Government. But it was squandered with such shameless knavery that defalcation seems to have been the recognized standard of official morality. The step from larceny to repudiation was short, and the contamination of the State became complete. The Peabody Education Fund has one million dollars in repudiated Mississippi bonds, which have been declared valid by the highest tribunals of the State, and the trustees of that noble charity have denied further participation in its benefits to the people upon the ground that they are debtors and defaulters.

Florida belongs in the same category. Repudiated bonds of that State are included in the endowment of Mr. Peabody, for which he expressed his confident expectations that provision for the payment of principal and interest would be made. The trustees declare, in their report, that Florida is in a prosperous condition and amply able to discharge all her legal and equitable obligations; that she is able to make abundant provision for her own common schools and no longer needs aid from the fund to which her people also are debtors and defaulters.

And yet, both these States stretch out their unclean hands in a passionate appeal for national sympathy and benevolence. Com-

mon schools are as indispensable to the safety of the republic as the army or the navy ; but, if they are to be supported by the General Government, the money should be expended by its own agents under the direction of Congress. Appropriations for the improvement of rivers and harbors, for the construction of railroads and for experiments in agriculture, are annually made to be spent in the different States, but it has never been claimed that on this account the control and supervision should be relinquished to local authorities. So, if ignorance exists in such measure as to threaten suffrage or to impair prosperity, the nation may unquestionably remove it, as it may build a breakwater or dredge a channel for commerce ; but it should be done as a national purpose through national agencies.

Probably the best method to accomplish this result would be by the establishment of training schools for teachers, educational cadets like those instructed in the military and naval schools at West Point and Annapolis. By this plan the General Government could elevate the standard of education without interfering with the freedom of State action. Symmetry, unity, and cohesion could be attained. Skilled supervision would increase the efficiency of the entire corps of instructors. Economy of administration would be secured and the States would be relieved of the largest item of expense which now attends the common school system. Such a force of teachers, wisely trained for their work, supported while pursuing their studies by the Government, and enlisting in its service after graduation, could be assigned to duty upon the frontier of illiteracy, the advance guard of a peaceful army, whose conquests would enlarge the boundaries of human knowledge and whose victories would increase the opportunities of human happiness.

To such a scheme as this no constitutional objections appear. The most rigid particularist could discern no violation either of the spirit or the letter of the Constitution. All parties could consistently unite in support of a measure which neither infringed upon the reserved powers of the States nor permitted those powers to prevent the accomplishment of a great deed of national duty and justice.

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